

SBC future the topic of seminary symposium

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP) — A slate of Southern Baptist leaders will speak at Midwestern Seminary's Sept. 28-29 symposium, The SBC and the 21st Century: Reflection, Renewal & Recommitment.

Midwestern Seminary President Jason Allen said the symposium will be the first edition of a triennial symposium held on the seminary's Kansas City, Mo., campus. He said the symposium is designed to address the Southern Baptist Convention and its heritage, identity, and future.

"The SBC and the 21st Century" is for pastors, denominational servants, laypersons, and anyone else who cares about our collective work as Southern Baptists," Allen said. "For all those who care about the SBC and its future, this is the place to be this year. We designed the symposium for key SBC stakeholders to speak to urgent denominational matters in a way that serves the entire SBC."

The event will be available via livestream, through posting and on the school's website. Each presenter's paper will be compiled into a book.

"We are pleased to be partnering with B&H Publishing to produce a book that will stem from the conference. The book will be released at the 2016 SBC Annual Meeting in St. Louis," Allen said. "We believe the presentations taking place at this symposium will serve to strengthen the SBC, and the release of this book will extend its reach."

More information on the symposium, including speakers, a full schedule of events, and how to register, can be found at mbts.edu/sbc-symposium.

On the web

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HAPPIER TIMES — Saeed Abedini (right) enjoys an outing with his son Jacob, prior to Saeed's 2012 arrest and imprisonment in Iran for allegedly planting Christian churches. Saeed remains in the Iranian prison system, where he has been beaten and tortured for his faith. (BP photo courtesy of ACLJ.org)

Jacob's anguish

Another birthday, still no dad at home

BOISE, Idaho (BP and local reports) — Written in the wobbly penmanship of a seven-year-old who has said he misses his dad "a thousand lots," Jacob's card invited his father to attend his birthday party on March 17.

American pastor Saeed Abedini couldn't attend the party at the family's home in Boise, Id., however, because he has been imprisoned in Iran under brutal conditions since Sept. 26, 2012, for allegedly planting Christian churches in the Muslim theocratic dictatorship.

Instead, Abedini wrote a letter offering his son the "gift of salvation."

"Even though I AM NOT there with you, I AM is there with you," Abedini wrote his son in a letter posted on

the website of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which is representing Saeed's wife Naghmeh and their two children.

"God came in human flesh in Jesus Christ all the way from heaven to the earth to give us the gift of salvation by being crucified on the cross for the punishment of our sin. So on this special day, I want you to accept this gift of salvation. Invite Jesus into your heart as you have invited me to your birthday."

Abedini's letter comes nearly two months after U.S. President Barack Obama told the family in a personal meeting on Jan. 21 in Boise that he would "try" to secure the pastor's release in time for the birthday celebration. The Obama administration has

said it is continuing efforts to that end as others work to free Abedini, including the ACLJ and Naghmeh.

However, no efforts to free Saeed since the meeting have been publicly disclosed by The White House as Obama's negotiators focus on a nuclear non-proliferation deal with the totalitarian Islamic government in Tehran.

On March 13, the ACLJ's international affiliate, the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ), testified before the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on Abedini's behalf, pointing out Iran's violation of the U.N. Charter and asking the U.N. to demand Abedini's immediate release.

"Despite recommendations from the UNHRC Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued on 26 August 2013, which found his detention in violation with international covenants and urged his

see ABEDINI on p. 9

Sign-up opens for SBC meet in Ohio

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP) — Registration for messengers and local hotels has opened for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Ohio's capital city.

The June 16-17 sessions will be led by SBC President Ronnie Floyd, senior pastor of multi-campus Cross Church in northwestern Arkansas, and will be themed "Great Awakening: Clear Agreement, Visible Union, Extraordinary Prayer."

The 2015 annual meeting once again will offer an online opportunity for churches to register their messengers at sbcanualmeeting.net.

Through online registration at the website's Messenger tab, each messenger will receive an eight-digit registration code to present at the annual meeting's Express Registration lane in Columbus. The code will be entered into a computer at the SBC registration area and a name tag will be printed.

Registration also is open for preschool child care and children's and youth programs in conjunction with the annual meeting.

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Elections looming

Americans in general seem to be in a mighty foul political mood these days. Who can blame us? Our political leaders up and down the line have largely failed us, from county supervisors spreading around sweetheart deals, to state legislators looking after special interests at taxpayer expense, to the U.S. President and Congress leading the country to the brink of world war and financial default all at once.

Too many of our political leaders are drunk with power (or just drunk). Too many are more interested in their own re-election than they are in the People's Business. Too many are enslaved to monied interests or personal aggrandizement. To be fair, there are politicians who are indeed focused solely on the public interest — but then again some politicians are simply unfit for office.

There's a great thing about living in a democratic republic as Americans do, and that's elections. We are not governed by kings or dictators in office for life, who smooth the way for their equally incompetent sons to take over when they die. When an American politician's specified term of office is nearing its end, he/she has to stand for re-election. If the people so choose, that politician is rewarded with another term of office. If it is not the will of a majority of the people voting in that particular election, he/she is turned out of office and a new person is elected.

With the task of determining the direction of the government comes great responsibility on the part of voters. Just as politicians sometimes fall short of voters' expectations, voters often fail those who stand for election by not being informed and prepared to select the best possible candidate. Studies show that many voters make their decisions based on the most shallow of considerations, such as a candidate's physical attractiveness or impressive elocution.

That should not be the case. Voting for our political leaders is much too important to be taken as lightly as many Americans do. If we elect scoundrels because we do not do our homework as involved citizens, then we will

get the government we deserve. On the other hand, if we elect the best candidates to office based on conversations with them and the study of their positions on important issues, we will get the government we deserve in that case too. It's our choice.

How do we judge the capabilities and qualifications of a candidate for the office he/she is seeking? One of the best ways is to consider the totality of that person's record both in public and private life. A big mistake voters often make in deciding for whom to vote is that we get stuck on one issue and expect the candidate to have a perfect scorecard on that one issue. If we are anti-abortion, that's the only issue that matters to us and we don't much care what the candidate believes about immigration reform. If we are passionate about immigration reform, we focus on that like a laser beam and overlook the candidate's position on abortion.

That's the way one-dimensional candidates get elected to office. They may appeal to you on a single issue that tickles your ears, but the totality of their record betrays that they are against you on almost every other important issue.

Don't fail to look at a candidate's private life, and don't be too timid to do so. While some people argue that a person's private life has nothing to do with his/her public life, that's simply not true. There are many sad examples of that fact, current and past.

The first primaries in Mississippi's quadrennial election cycle are nearly upon us (August 4). That doesn't give us much time to study the candidates, who will be touting their credentials to hold office and pressing voters to elect them. Pray for them, and pray for wisdom in exercising your right to vote.

As Christians and as Baptists, there are issues important to us that each candidate should be prepared to address, such as abortion, same sex marriage, and marijuana legalization. We need to ask tough questions and expect honest answers. We need to do our homework. We need to be ready when we walk into the voting booth.

Rest assured we're going to get the government we deserve, one way or the other.

Listen, go, witness

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40) is the story of a man with a hole in his soul. The Ethiopian had an emptiness that would not leave him, no matter what he tried to pack in his life. The brief narrative in Acts 8 unfolds his story around three themes:

■ **A reading man.** The Ethiopian had traveled from his home to Jerusalem to participate in celebratory worship. On his return home, he was reading from Isaiah's prophecy, seeking to understand its underlying message. This was a man of great power and prestige. He had charge of the Queen's treasury. He was likely dressed in finery and traveling in the "Rolls Royce" chariot of his time. From outward appearances, this man seemed to have everything but the Lord, who has placed eternity in the heart of every person, was at work in his life.

■ **A running man.** The Lord prompted Philip to leave the revival taking place in Samaria and go on a wilderness journey. When Philip saw the chariot, the Lord instructed him to overtake the chariot. As Philip ran toward the chariot, he had no idea what he would find. He was not intimidated by the obvious finery of the chariot, the adornment of the horses, the attire of the attendants. He did not know what the Ethiopian was thinking about until he got near enough to hear him reading from Isaiah's prophecy. He just ran, knowing that this would be his one and only opportunity ever to engage this man with the Gospel of Christ.

■ **A rejoicing man.** When the Ethiopian heard the Gospel, his life was changed. He asked Philip what hindered him from being baptized. Philip answered, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." Confessing his faith, he was baptized. When he came up out of the water, he became a rejoicing man.

The Gospel will make a man happy! It makes every true believer joyous. If a man or woman doesn't get happy when he or she trusts in Christ, they didn't get Jesus! When the Lord finds you, His presence and joy follows you the rest of your life. History gives us reason to believe that, upon returning to his country, this new follower of Jesus shared his story with the Queen and others in his native land



Guest opinion with Charles Locklear

with the effect that others also trusted in Christ as their Lord.

This brief story from Scripture teaches several transferable ideas:

■ **We must continually make ourselves open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.** Evangelism cannot always be planned. When we are open to the Lord, He will direct us to people in whose hearts He has already been moving.

■ **We must look for opportunities to share the Gospel, even if the intended person seems far off, looks different from us, or seems otherwise unapproachable.** The Lord did not bring the Ethiopian to Philip. Philip ran to adjoin himself to the chariot.

■ **We must become convinced that a missed opportunity is a lost opportunity.** Philip did not know how the man in the chariot would respond; but he knew there would be no other chance to speak with this man from another country who was returning home.

■ **We must believe that we have a message to share.** The power of the Gospel has not diminished. Where it is shared, people's lives are changed.

Heaven will be populated with people of every economic class, every race, every tongue. Let each of us pray that the Lord will use us to tell the Gospel message to those we meet. We must not be put off if they look different from us. God is no respecter of persons. The Spirit of God continues to move where He wishes (John 3:8). It is His job to save. It is our job to tell.

Locklear is pastor of Calvary Way Church, Pembroke, N.C. He also is director of Morning Star Ministries, reaching Native Americans with the Good News of Jesus Christ, on the Web at www.morningstar-ministries.com. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

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Is gambling on basketball tourney really that bad?

NASHVILLE (BP) — Putting \$10 in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament office pool may seem harmless, but some contend it violates federal and state laws as well as biblical principles.

"Christians would be wise to refrain from gambling on the NCAA Tournament," said Barrett Duke, vice president for public policy and research at Southern Baptists' Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville. "That is the best way to make sure they are not violating their responsibilities before God and their fellow man. They should share their convictions with others and encourage them to refrain as well."

The FBI estimates that more than \$2.5 billion is wagered on March Madness each year, exceeding the amount bet on the Super Bowl, according to the NCAA website. The American Gaming Association estimated that Americans have filled out 70 million brackets this year with the average bet per bracket coming in at \$29.

The total number of brackets filled out exceeds the total number of votes cast in the last presidential election.

NCAA says no

The NCAA "opposes all forms of gambling — legal and illegal — on college sports," according to the group's website. Betting on college sports provides children an entry point to gambling, prompts individuals involved in organized crime to contact student-athletes, and "threatens the well-being of student-athletes and the integrity of the game," the NCAA said in a statement on its website.

NCAA Tournament betting also violates federal law and gambling laws in many states, law professor Marc Edelman wrote in Forbes.

"Most participants who pay entry fees into NCAA Tournament pools will probably never stop to consider the legal implications of their actions," wrote Edelman, an associate professor of law at the City University of New York's Baruch College who specializes in sports law and gaming law. "However, while the participants in NCAA pools are rarely prosecuted, there is a strong argument that pay-to-enter contests violate both federal and state law."

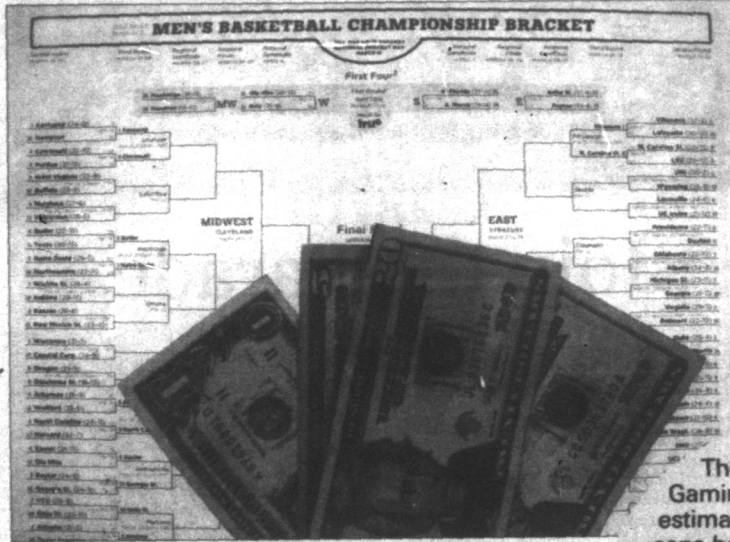
At least three federal laws appear to prohibit NCAA Tournament pools in which money is involved, according to Edelman:

- The Interstate Wire Act of 1961 has been interpreted by numerous courts as forbidding gambling online.

- The Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act of 1992 makes it illegal for any private person to operate a wagering scheme based on a competitive game in which "professional or amateur athletes participate."

A grandfather clause exempts previously authorized gambling in Nevada, Delaware, Oregon, and Montana.

- The Uniform Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 prohibits those "engaged in the business of bet-



ting or wagering" from knowingly accepting funds connected with unlawful Internet gambling.

"Beyond these three federal laws, there is also a strong argument that many pay-to-enter NCAA Tournament polls violate state gambling laws," Edelman wrote.

Check the Bible

Biblical principles relate to betting on college basketball as well, Duke told Baptist Press in written comments.

"When we gamble, we misuse some of the resources entrusted to us by God, we set a dangerous example for others to follow, and we lend credibility to a practice that destroys millions of people every year. First Corinthians 10:31 reminds the Christian of his stewardship responsibility. The Christian must use all the resources at his disposal in a manner that glorifies God. This includes the little things as well."

"He must also remember that his actions influence the decisions of others. In 1 Corinthians 8:13, the apostle Paul instructs the Christian to be sure his activity does not cause another to stumble by following his example. While someone may be able to control his gambling, someone else who follows his example may not."

"Also, the principle of neighbor love is important. Jesus illustrated the principle of neighbor love in Luke chapter 10 with the story of the Samaritan. Neighbor love puts the needs of others first. The Christian must bear in mind that he has a responsibility to help others flourish. Engaging in

an activity that takes what belongs to another is not putting others first."

Not all forms of gambling are "equally egregious," Duke said, noting that "the most egregious forms of gambling involve high levels of chance and significant potential for repentance" — activities like playing roulette, betting on slot machines, and buying lottery tickets.

High levels of chance and significant potential for repentance "are not as prominent in an activity like betting on a sports bracket that occurs once a year," Duke said. Nevertheless, casino gaming, buying lottery tickets, and betting on March Madness "are all forms of gambling since they depend ultimately on varying degrees of chance. The faithful Christian would be wise to refrain from any form of gambling."

Companies "whose business model depends on people gambling and losing are by nature predatory" and "bear greater responsibility before God for their treatment of others than the person who puts a few dollars down on a sports bracket," Duke said.

"The Christian must understand, however, that gambling is not a harmless form of entertainment, like going to the movies," Duke pointed out. "The movies do not destroy millions of lives every year. A Christian should do all he can to avoid empowering gambling organizations to continue to prey on people."



DUKE



EDELMAN



CHITWOOD

Harmless?

Paul Chitwood, executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, told Baptist Press gambling "is a growing problem in our nation as well as in Kentucky" — where the University of Kentucky is the overall number one seed in this year's tournament and the University of Louisville is a four seed.

"When we stop to consider that organized crime is the big winner when people gamble, that the integrity of the games and athletes we love is threatened, and that countless thousands of children suffer the consequences of their parents' gambling addiction, one could hardly call gambling a harmless endeavor," Chitwood said in written comments.

Placing even minimal wagers on basketball games violates biblical principles, Chitwood stressed. "The Bible warns us repeatedly against the sins of greed and covetousness, both of which are the essential motivations in gambling."

"Moreover, Christ followers are called to love our neighbor. Taking our neighbor's money, even if it is the person in the neighboring cubicle at work, is a poor expression of the love of Christ."

While most NCAA Tournament betting appears to be illegal, there is some disagreement among Christian denominations regarding whether some forms of gambling are permissible. For example, the Roman Catholic Church believes "games of chance" or "wagers" are "not in themselves contrary to justice," according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Instances of wagering become "morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others," the Catechism states. "The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement. Unfair wagers and cheating at games constitute grave matter, unless the damage inflicted is so slight that the one who suffers it cannot reasonably consider it significant."

SBC speaks

In contrast, a 1997 Southern Baptist Convention resolution "call[ed] on all Christians to exercise their influence by refusing to participate in any form of gambling or its promotion." The resolution noted that gambling "has left in its wake pain and destruction in the lives of countless people."

A 2014 SBC resolution opposed all government sponsorship of gambling.

The American Gaming Association estimated that Americans have filled out 70 million brackets this year with the average bet per bracket coming in at \$29. The total number of brackets filled out exceeds the total number of votes cast in the last presidential election.

"When we gamble, we misuse some of the resources entrusted to us by God, we set a dangerous example for others to follow, and we lend credibility to a practice that destroys millions of people every year."

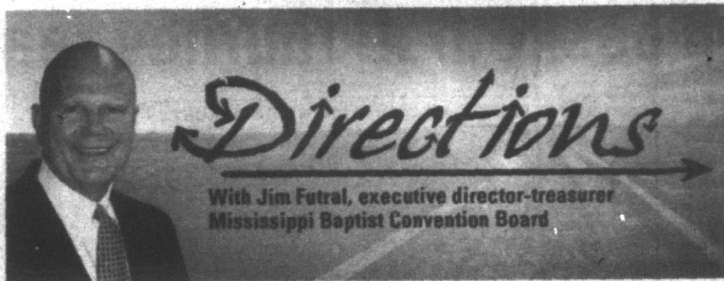
Barrett Duke, vice president for public policy and research at Southern Baptists' Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

It was a beautiful, mild, sun-drenched February morning in the South. I had spoken to a church group on Friday night and left early Saturday morning coming back home. It was before 9 o'clock in the morning as I was passing through the south Mississippi town when I got into a mess. I had no idea what I was getting into but soon realized what was taking place.

It was Saturday before Mardi Gras day so in this town they were having a Mardi Gras parade on Saturday morning. Before I could turn right or left or do anything I was in a line of cars that were being channeled into the parade start area. That is not where I wanted to go and not where I needed to be. I kept surveying the street and how to get off and where I might turn and get around all this stuff, but police were at intersections along the way directing us to stay in line and move forward.

Some of the folks did pull off into parking areas where they could get out and I assume watch the parade. I didn't think I wanted to do that so I inched along thinking I would get through eventually, but then we arrived at a large intersection right at the staging area for the parade. I was at the front of the line and we all had to stop. Crossing over in front of me was a Mardi Gras float with 75-100 people dressed in all their finery and having a grand old time.

As you know, the people on the floats are called krewes, and this one came from some part of the town there and called themselves the Krewe of d'Hood. I assume d'Neighborhood. They had music blaring from every corner of the float and they were ready for the parade to begin. I was nothing but a simple, innocent bystander to all that was taking place, but soon, and I mean very soon, I was directed by the policeman to follow the Krewe of d'Hood. I waved my hands no and was trying to roll the window down to tell him, "I'm not



Join the Parade

a part of the parade!" His emphatic gestures indicated, "You are a part of this and you're going to follow them." And I did.

The folks onboard the float were thrilled to see me joining with them. I waved at them, smiled, and slowly drove behind them as they parted in the pre-parade staging area. Having lived in south Mississippi and having gone to New Orleans Seminary, I had been to Mardi Gras parades and they are wild and woolly and seem to be fun filled events, but I had never been in a Mardi Gras parade in my life.

But there I was behind the Krewe of d'Hood waving and smiling at people. Now in the midst of the fun they were having and my forced participation, I was looking for a way out and soon I took a road that led to where I did not know, but it was not going with the rest of the parade and that was fine with me. For a few short minutes, I was Mr. Somebody riding in the car by himself, waving at folks and celebrating I'm not sure what. I wound around through the community for a little while and found my way back and got on the road and headed home.

They always say in New Orleans it doesn't matter where you are, or what the occasion, a party can break out and a parade will start. A funeral, a wedding, a graduation or a separation, strike up the band, let the parade begin. It's kind of crazy, isn't it? So much of the Mardi Gras festivities, while on the appearance outwardly is good times and joyous, raucous laughter, is not altogether that what it may appear. But as I reflected on my two minutes of Mardi Gras fame I thought about a parade that broke out for Jesus.

It was the beginning of the end. The last week of His life and Jesus came to Jerusalem. He was riding on a little donkey and the crowds that were all over the city took note of Him and people began to treat Him as though He was a celebrity, as though He was something special, as though He was something from God, for He was. "Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:9). They put down their coats so that He wouldn't have to ride over the rough, cobbled stones and others broke off palm branches and laid them before Him and the parade continued and the praise was over-

flowing. And anyone could come and join the parade to praise Him, to participate in honoring Him, to take off their robe or cloak and put it before Him or break off some palm leaves to place before Him. And for a while, that moment we called the triumphal entry was an unparalleled parade that within days would end on a cross. After His death, He was placed in a tomb and three days later, praise God, the parade continued.

But as you stop and think about that parade that broke out, people of Jerusalem and along the way were faced with decisions. Then and even now, you can decide to join the parade for Jesus or reject being a part of it. For the folks there and now it is impossible just to ignore the parade. Jesus who is, one day will be known by everyone as the King of kings and Lord of lords, cannot be ignored. Sure you can reject him. You can discuss, analyze, rationalize and justify rejecting Him, but you cannot ignore Him. He welcomes us with joy to the parade.

Sometimes it seems like there are folks who are part of what appears to be the followers of Jesus who don't really want to be there. They're sort of like me Saturday morning in a Mardi Gras parade. They may even be at church, but it is pretty obvious that they're not participating in the parade. There's little involvement. There's no expression of joy. They seem like the police ordered them to turn and follow the Krewe of d'Hood.

While, on the other hand, there are people who hear the song and celebrate the delight and the wonder of the God of heaven welcoming us to join the parade. I may never again be at and surely will not be in a Mardi Gras parade, but the one for Jesus I've enjoyed for a long time, and am confident that I am going to enjoy it for eternity. Come, join the parade.

The author can be contacted at directions@mccb.org.

U.S. Senate fight over abortion stymies human trafficking bill

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — Legislation to bolster efforts to combat human trafficking has fallen victim to abortion rights advocates in the U.S. Senate.

The Democrat Party minority in the Senate defeated an effort to bring an anti-trafficking bill to the Senate floor March 17 because of its opposition to language barring federal funds for abortion.

The Senate twice voted 55-43 to invoke cloture, as it is known, which would directly open debate on the floor for action on the legislation, but fell short of the needed two-thirds vote (66).

The vote came on legislation that would enhance penalties for such crimes as slavery and trafficking, as well as sexual exploitation

of children. The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, S. 178, would also increase restitution for trafficking victims and fund services for child pornography victims.

Mississippi Senators Thad Cochran and Roger Wicker, both Republicans, voted in favor of invoking cloture and moving the bill along for debate.

All but four Democrats voted against bringing the bill to the Senate floor. The only Republican to vote against cloture was Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, whose "nay" vote was required for him to bring the measure up for a future vote.

The legislation appeared to have no chance of defeat until a week before the March 17 cloture votes. It had

13 Democratic co-sponsors upon introduction and gained unanimous approval from the Judiciary Committee.

Democrats suddenly began criticizing language that bars funds made available in the bill from being used for abortions. The ban, known as the Hyde Amendment, first became law in 1976 and has since been applied widely in federal programs.

Abortion-rights advocacy organizations such as NARAL Pro-choice America and the National Organization for Women criticized Republicans for including the language, and Senate Democrats joined them.

NARAL described inclusion of the Hyde language as "another manipulative attempt by extremists."

BIBL i O C I P H E R

HUG PF NHZG, YPFLFIJLF NHZG Z KUYJ

XJK, YPHY UJ WHU EHU EJWF KUYJ

WF, FTEFOY ZY RFLF CZQFU KUYJ PZW

JI WX IHYPFL

BJPU NZT:NZTYX-IZQF

Clue: K = U

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 21:27

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

Onward, Christian Soldiers

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (II Timothy 2:3) were the words that stirred Pastor Sabine Baring-Gould to write "Onward, Christian Soldiers" in 1865. It was written as a processional hymn for children of the parish who marched into the cities carrying banners and crosses. The hymn became a favorite and even famous, as it was used at President Dwight D. Eisenhower's funeral. Due to its military references, the hymn has become controversial with some denominations stripping it from their hymnals in recent years. Yet, stanza one, "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus

going on before! Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe; forward into battle, see his banner go! Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before!" is perhaps more apropos today than it was 151 years ago when it was penned in England.

Today, Christians and their churches are being ridiculed, persecuted, and even murdered in all parts of the world. In our own nation the evangelical community is being asked, or perhaps more accurately, commanded by militants and activists to set aside their religious beliefs in order to accommodate anti-Christian behavior.

For over fifty years the Christian Action Commission



with Jimmy Porter

has sought to be a prophetic voice stating the obvious. Too often we have felt like John the Baptist, "a voice crying in the wilderness." For too long the words of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" have just filled a page in a hymnal and forgotten as we quickly moved on to the next item printed in the program.

Be assured that the apostle Paul did not choose the word "soldier" accidentally. He understood there would always be tension between the believing and unbelieving world. Paul knew that righteousness and unrighteousness, godliness and Godliness, along with evil and good would always be at war. This begs the question, "As a Christian, what am I to do?"

Sure is a simple question, isn't it? Five little words, "What am I to do?" So let me answer in five simple words, "Do what Jesus would do!" The rub comes when everyone has an opinion

on how they think Jesus would react to the world today!

Do you ever feel like Elijah running for your life and then waiting in a cave for God's directions? There were many noises but only one was the voice of God. Paul stated in I Corinthians 14:8, "For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" The obvious answer is "no one."

To be clear there are some things we all have learned about being a soldier. Not everyone is going to like you. Not everyone is going to agree with your methods. Not everyone is going to write nice things about you in the paper. At times you will come away battered, bloodied, and dirty, but at least you tried to be a soldier of the "King." You followed orders.

The true soldier listens to the orders as they come down from the commanding officer. For us that is Christ, and His words are recorded for us in scripture. You can listen to the words of religious gurus around the world, to our own national and local religious leaders, but if they are not consistent with scripture, Paul says their voices are uncertain sounds from the trumpet. Their words are as useless as "clouds without water," to borrow a phrase from Jude. This is neither the time to retreat, to accommodate, or become a pacifist. The cultural war is ablaze and the fire is only getting hotter.

It has been documented that when Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt met in August 1941 on the battleship HMS Prince of Wales to agree to the Atlantic Charter, a church service was held for which Prime Minister Churchill chose the hymns. He chose, "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and afterwards made a radio broadcast explaining this choice: "We sang Onward, Christian Soldiers" indeed, and I felt that this was no vain presumption, but that we had the right to feel that we were serving a cause for the sake of which a trumpet has sounded from on high. When I looked upon that densely packed congregation of fighting men of the same language, of the same faith, of the same fundamental laws, of the same ideals...it swept across me that here was the only hope, but also the sure hope, of saving the world from measureless degradation." —Winston Churchill.

"Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before!" May we hear God's trumpet loud and clear and prepare ourselves for the battles that are yet to come!

Porter serves as executive director-treasurer for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission. He can be contacted at 601-292-3332 or jporter@christianaction.com.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

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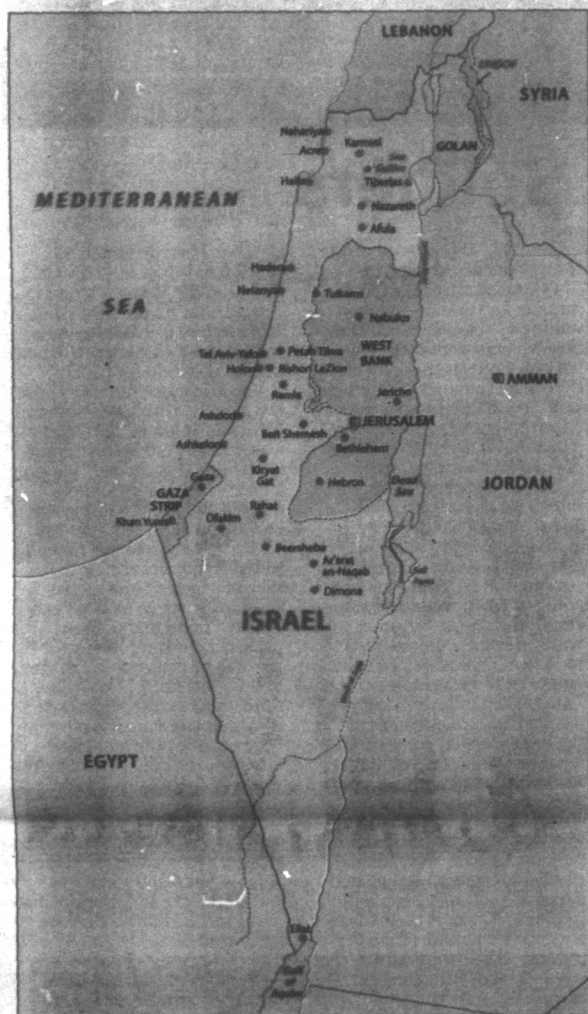
1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life.

From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Evangelists to Jews analyze Israeli election outcome



ISRAEL (BP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's reelection is good for Israel, but the only hope for reconciliation in the Middle East is the acceptance of Jesus Christ by Jews and Arabs alike, two evangelists to Jews told Baptist Press.

Netanyahu's victory gained his Likud Party 29 seats in the country's one-chamber parliament, but does not guarantee his success in building a coalition of partners in the 120-seat body, analysts say. The left-leaning Zionist Union gained 24 seats.

Jim Sibley, a lecturer in biblical studies at the Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel, and the former coordinator of Jewish ministries at the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga., called Netanyahu's reelection remarkable, as it overcame "significant foreign investment in his opposition," and contradicted opinion polls against him.

"It was also significant because of a change in Netanyahu's position regarding Judea and Samaria. He abandoned the two-state solution, which has been a hallmark of both American and Israeli policy, saying that a Palestinian State at present would be a terrorist state," Sibley told Baptist Press (BP) in a written statement.

"Instead, a growing number of observers are persuaded that exercising Israeli sovereignty will be both in Israel's interests and in the interests of the Arab population. This would especially be true of the Christian Arabs who have been leaving the area in record numbers due to fears of Muslim persecution.

"Regardless, as Christians, we know that the only lasting peace will come as Israelis and Arabs embrace peace with God through faith in Jesus. Ultimately, reconciliation will not be found in political solutions, but only in Christ."

Prior to the election Netanyahu pledged to prevent Palestinian statehood, but in an MSNBC interview after his election he said he still favors two states, but that such a solution was not possible as long as Hamas has power.

Mitch Glaser, a Messianic believer and president of the Chosen People Ministries in New

York City, has shown a film featuring the testimony of a young Israeli Christian to 250,000 Israelis — a sign of their openness to Christianity, he told BP.

The median age in Israel is just under 30 years old, Glaser said, which puts many Israelites on active duty reserve in the Israeli army. Younger Israelis are experiencing economic and security struggles that have made them open to Christianity as a solution, Glaser believes.

"I especially pray for this new generation of Israelis who are generally hurting economically and eager for good relationships with Palestinians while at the same time deeply concerned for the security of the nation. This internal conflict was evident in the recent election," Glaser told BP in a written statement.

"Until the day comes when Hamas in Gaza recognizes the existence of the state of Israel, and

reasonable national security and safety for the far dominant Jewish population of Israel is established with the Palestinian Authority who have attempted to form a coalition with Hamas, these young Israelis will be constantly concerned with security when in fact they would prefer building a viable economy and home for their children.

"This is why I believe many younger Israelis are open to the Gospel."

In 2013, Christians numbered 378,000 or three percent of the population in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip combined, including Arabs and non-Arabs, according to the 2013-14 CIA World Fact Book.

"It is my hope that Israelis would continue to be open to the Gospel — especially the young people who have shown an increasing interest in hearing more about

Jesus the Messiah," Glaser said. Like Sibley, he believes political change can speed progress.

"It is my hope that Benjamin Netanyahu would be able to form a coalition that shares his values for Israel's defense and that Israel would remain resolute and determined in the face of ongoing hostility with Iran; Hamas (in Gaza), Hezbollah (in Southern Lebanon) and ISIS."

"It is my hope that the people of the United States, especially Christians, would be increasingly vocal in reminding our president of our historic commitments to Israel so that the current tensions between our nations might subside as together we battle against 'Jihadist extremism' in the Middle East and around the globe."



SIBLEY



GLASER

U.N. special advisor: outlook for Yemeni civil war on 'the edge'

SANAA, Yemen (BP) — As political upheaval dating back to the Arab Spring continues in the Middle Eastern country of Yemen, United Nations special adviser Jamal Benomar expressed concern that the nation is moving toward civil war.

The U.N. Security Council met on March 22 to discuss the mounting crisis in the Middle East, he said the country is in a "rapid downward spiral" and at "the edge of civil war."

Greg Voss (not his real name), a Christian worker in the Middle East, observed, "Honestly, most Yemenis would rather go back to the days before the Arab Spring."

As violence escalated between the country's ruling Sunni Muslims and rebel Houthi Shiite Mus-

lims, both the United States and the United Kingdom withdrew security forces. The U.S. closed its embassy in Yemen in February.

During Friday prayers on March 20, suicide bombers attacked two mosques linked to the Houthis, killing at least 125 people and wounding hundreds in the nation's capital, Sanaa. A Sunni group claiming to be a branch of ISIS said they were responsible for the bombings.

Yemen is home to al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), one of the most powerful branches of the terrorist organization. AQAP denied any involvement in last week's attacks on the mosques.

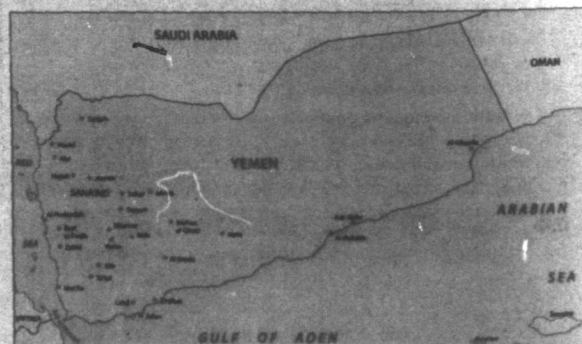
On March 22, Houthi rebels took control of an international airport and government buildings in the city of Taiz, 240 miles south of Sanaa. In January, the rebels

surrounded the presidential palace in Sanaa.

Days later Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi resigned. He has since rescinded his resignation and made the Red Sea port city of Aden his provisional capital. There is increasing concern that the likelihood of civil war grows as the rebels continue their push south.

The tumultuous repercussions of the Arab Spring have forced many Yemenis to question much of what they thought secure.

Despite the lack of religious and political freedom, they had far more stability — consistent jobs, electricity and water, and school for their kids. Now, much of this has vanished. Yemen currently has one of the worst humanitarian crises in the Middle East. More than 10 million people need food assis-



tance and 13 million cannot access clean water.

Yemen is south of Saudi Arabia, the heart of Islam. Traditionally, northern Yemen has been tribal and religiously conservative, adhering to the strictest interpretation of Islam and thus quite hostile to Christians.

Southern Yemen has typically been less hostile toward the Gospel than the north, though still quite restrictive.

In both the north and south,

believers continue to live out their faith as boldly as they can and support one another amid the hardships they now face.

Voss urges believers to remember God is sovereign over all of this and that He continues drawing Yemenis to Himself. Another Christian worker said, "At times it seems hopeless. However, our trust is not in governments or coalitions or politics. We trust in the sovereign God of history. He is working and moving, even in Yemen."

Just for the Record



Five children and four adults from **TRINITY CHURCH, MONROE** County, participated in Children's Ministry Day Feb. 14 by taking valentines and valentine candy to the residents of the Golden Living Nursing Center, Amory, and afterwards enjoyed lunch at Wendy's.

In other Church News:

► **Academy Church, Blue Mountain**, will host the Old Paths Quartet and the Servants Quartet in concert Mar. 27, 7 p.m. Love offering. Wayne Cobb, pastor.

► **Carrollton Church, Carrollton**, is sponsoring God Speaks, beginning April 3rd at 9:00a.m. and ending Easter Sunday, April 5th at sunrise, on the Courthouse grounds in Carrollton. Call the church at (662) 237-9351, 8:00a.m. to 12 noon, Monday thru Friday to sign up for 15 minute intervals of reading the Bible. Church and Civic groups, families and individuals are welcome.



The **TRI-COUNTY ASSOCIATION** (Lawrence, Walthall, and Marion) team spent spring break on mission in Mexico. The team consisted of 41 people, including participants from Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri.



Lisa Ingram, preschool ministry coordinator, **FIRST CHURCH, VICKSBURG**, retired after 12 years of service. A reception was held in her honor Mar. 4. Shown are Ingram and Laura Gee, interim preschool coordinator.



The children's handbell choir of **CARROLLTON CHURCH, CARROLLTON**, performed during the morning worship service Mar. 15.

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The youth of **BRANCH CHURCH, MORTON**, shared a black light song presentation Feb. 22.



DOUBLE SPRINGS CHURCH, MABON, ordained Brannon Armstrong to the ministry Mar. 8. Shown are Kenneth Armstrong, Armstrong, Laken Armstrong, Cooper Armstrong, and Larry Odem.

Baptists leading out in the effort to restore Ferguson

FERGUSON, Mo. (BP) — Changing the streets of unrest in Ferguson to streets of love and ministry is the aim of an Adopt a Block initiative now underway amid the Missouri city's racial tensions.

Adopt a Block is "a good, simple plan," said Stoney Shaw, pastor of First Church, Ferguson, one of the participating local congregations. "We want to join with other churches and minister. Walking the streets and praying is a simple yet powerful plan," he told *The Pathway*, news journal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

The Adopt a Block initiative is being organized as racial tumult continues in the city of 21,000 just northwest of St. Louis, triggered last August when a Ferguson police officer shot and killed an unarmed black 18-year-old in a heated confrontation. Tensions mounted with the March 4 release of a Justice Department inquiry that exonerated police officer Darren Wilson in the death of Michael Brown but found widespread discrimination by police against the city's black residents.

The police chief, city manager, and a municipal judge soon resigned. Two police officers were wounded in gunfire on March 12. On March 16, the accused shooter's attorney claimed that his client was beaten by police officers and coerced into confessing.

The new Adopt a Block initiative is being led by Jose Aguayo, a chaplain with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's Rapid Response Team and pastor of Dorea Ministries in Ferguson.

Teams of several church members will adopt a block in Ferguson for ongoing outreach. "This is a point of connection with the community and a way to show love," Aguayo said. "We want to establish a relationship with the people in the neighborhood."

In the beginning, Aguayo said, the visitation will involve an introduction — "a hello with prayer." As relationships develop, Aguayo



HEALING BEGINS — Ferguson residents began putting their city back together after late-November rioting stemming from a grand jury decision not to indict a local police officer in the shooting death of an unarmed black teen. Local Baptist churches are playing a major role in the healing process. (BP photo)

noted that "discipleship will follow. Eventually sports teams, community outings, and study assistance for children and adults will take place."

Adopt a Block is a ministry model begun about 20 years ago at the Dream Center in Los Angeles, part of a network of ministries nationally, Aguayo said.

First Church hosted one of the initial training sessions, providing training and resources developed by the Billy Graham ministry. First Church also hosted a Nov. 13 prayer summit and has been part of local efforts to provide child care and revitalize downtown businesses that were looted in rioting after a grand jury declined to indict Wilson in late November.

"Prayerwalking and talking with people is so important," Shaw said. "They need to see our faces in the community."

Shaw noted in written comments to Baptist Press March 20, "We have been an outreaching church for a long time, but this is a steady outreach to the same block or area of our community either weekly or every other

week. We hope to get to know people on our block of ministry — to pray for each person and anything, that is important to them and to develop a relationship with each one as we go back. After a few times we will actually know who we are relating to...."

"As it develops, anyone in the church can have such a ministry anytime they want to. I believe most Christians want to have a ministry and once they understand this approach, I believe most people will desire this type of ministry instead of a 'hit-and-run' approach, cold turkey calls, or confrontations."

"This way, you can have a relationship with a person you know by name before you ever begin talking with them about the Gospel. People will 'see' the Gospel (of love and care) before they ever hear it. We know it is easier to hear the Gospel from someone you know than a complete stranger. Why? Because we know this person (the adopt-a-block person) has paid the price and earned the right to share the most important news a person has ever heard."

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MERIDIAN CHURCH SEEKS PIANIST. With both sight reading and accompaniment skills and will be responsible for playing with other musicians for weekly worship services and adult choir rehearsals. Salary will be based on experience. Email resume to glnyruffin@att.net.

WE ARE SEARCHING FOR A YOUTH DIRECTOR. Please send resumes to Central Baptist Church, P.O. Box 310, McMillan, MS 39457 or call the Church office at 601-799-2043.

VICTORY BAPTIST CHURCH IN MATHISTON, MS, IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR EITHER A BI-VOCATIONAL OR A FULL-TIME PASTER. Please send resumes to: Victory Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 12, Mathiston, Ms.

PLEASANT GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH, BROOKHAVEN, MS, IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER. Email resumes to pleasantgrove2170@att.net or mail to Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, 2162 Old Hwy 84 West, Brookhaven, MS 39601. Resumes will be received until April 17, 2015.

LAKE HARBOR BAPTIST CHURCH IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR A PIANO PLAYER AND A MUSIC DIRECTOR. Please send resumes to: Lake Harbor Baptist Church %Personnel Committee P. O. Box 339, Sandhill, Ms 39161 or email resumes to susi.moore@gmail.com

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GLENDALE IN HATTIESBURG MS IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER. Please email resumes to: fbq2311@comcast.net or mail to 2311 Glendale Avenue, Hattiesburg MS 39401. We are looking for someone for 15-20 hours per week.

NORTH WINONA BAPTIST CHURCH IN WINONA, MS IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF MINISTER OF MUSIC. Please send resume to 612 Alberta Drive, Winona, MS 38967, or email to nwbcbadmission@att.net

BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH, A SMALL COUNTRY CHURCH BETWEEN DREW AND RULEVILLE, MISS. IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR til 1 April 2015. Please send resumes to P.O. Box 249, Drew, Miss. 38737.

BUCATUNNA BAPTIST CHURCH IN CLARKE COUNTY IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR EITHER BI-VOCATIONAL OR FULL-TIME PASTOR. Please send resumes to: 10806 CR514, Meridian, MS 39301

STRONG RIVER BAPTIST CHURCH IN PINOLA, MS IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR. Please send resumes to Gene Farmer at 209 Katie Bush Rd Pinola, MS 39149

AUBURN BAPTIST CHURCH IN TUPELO MS IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR THE POSITION OF CHILDREN'S MINISTER. Please email resumes to henry@auburnbaptistchurch.org or mail to Auburn Baptist Church, 1138 Road 931, Tupelo, Ms 38804

Bivocational music minister course begins across state

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) — The spring term begins with *Class Voice*, the eighth of eight courses offered for bivocational music leaders offered by the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson and New Orleans Seminary.

In most locations, the course will meet two hours per week for eight weeks. Saturday locations may vary. Each student who completes the eight courses

earns a certificate from the Providence Learning Center of New Orleans Seminary.

There is a one-time enrollment fee of \$25.00. The cost of each course is \$100. A \$60.00 scholarship is available for all first-time students. The course will be taught at:

■ Immanuel Church, Cleveland. Began March 23 (10 a.m. - noon). Alan Berry, teacher. (662) 402-5645.

■ First Church, Marion. Began March 16 (6:30 - 8:30

p.m.). Buddy McElroy, teacher. (601) 938-8668.

■ Lincoln Association, Brookhaven. Beginning April 11 (9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.). Mark Hamilton, teacher. (601) 835-6607.

For more information, contact the teachers listed above or Slater Murphy, MBCB church music director, at 515 Mississippi St., Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3276 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 276. E-mail: smurphy@mbcb.org.

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First Person: Columbus meet to sport new look, feel

by Trevin Wax
Correspondent

Summer is for vacations and, for many pastors, denominational gatherings. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting is no exception. This year we're meeting in Columbus, Ohio, the 15th largest city in the U.S., and one that is well outside of the Southeast where most of our churches are based.

In the past decade, though the attendance at the annual meeting has risen and fallen in conjunction with the location and the major topic of conversation (or controversy), the overall trend has been a dwindling of messengers. This isn't surprising, considering the loosening of denominational loyalty and the variety of good conferences a pastor can attend, but Columbus might buck the decline. Here are three reasons

I'm particularly excited about this year's annual meeting:

■ The annual meeting is trending younger. At the SBC annual meeting in Baltimore last year, we saw a 10-year high of younger messengers involved in the convention proceedings. Baptist Press reported that "nearly one-fourth (24.68 percent) of attendees were younger than age 40. That surpassed by more than four percentage points the previous best for the age group, recorded in 2013."

My first visit to a Southern Baptist Convention was in San Antonio in 2007, as a 25-year-old associate pastor. I remember my initial shock at the small number of young people present. Recent years have seen an upswing in younger Southern Baptist engagement, a reality that is especially surprising when considered alongside the millennial generation's diminishing enthusiasm for institutions in general.



WAX

What this tells me is that the annual meeting is beginning to show signs of becoming a vibrant network, not just a report on denominational infrastructure.

■ The schedule of the annual meeting has been reworked in order to highlight the things we are most passionate about. Few people get excited about a business meeting. Most messengers admit they come to network and see friends, not sit through every session of the SBC but this year will be different, thanks to a reworking of the schedule under the leadership of the SBC's president, Ronnie Floyd. For example, all the missions entities will present on Wednesday morning, and it won't just be a time of reports but also commissioning of missionaries.

The Send North America conference, slated by the North American Mission Board for this summer in Nashville, already has drawn more than 7,000 registrants, a staggering figure when you consider the fact that only one Convention since 2010

has come close to that number.

What does this tell us? Southern Baptists are hungry for a meeting that casts vision and rallies our people around a great cause. They're not necessarily there, first and foremost, to vote on resolutions.

Resolutions matter, and so does our business. As Southern Baptists, we should care about the annual meeting and we should care about this meeting because we care about the Kingdom of God. Business meetings come and go with their moments of boredom and hilarity, awkwardness and quiet power, and yet in these moments decisions are made and courses are set that define our cooperative work the rest of the year. It's not glamorous, but the work of the Kingdom rarely is. This year, however, features a streamlined schedule that emphasizes what we're there for.

■ We will pray for God to awaken His church to the opportunities before us. The Tuesday evening meeting will be a time of prayer and worship, a pleading

with God to revive His people and empower our witness. It is easy to bemoan the moral decay of our culture, the encroaching limits to religious liberties, and the difficulty of evangelism in a relativistic society but we shouldn't miss the opportunity here. By cherishing once-common things, such as marriage between a man and woman for life and core Christian doctrines, such as the exclusivity of Christ for salvation, we have the opportunity for our ordinary obedience to shine even brighter in a pluralistic world that bows to Aphrodite. The annual meeting gives us the opportunity to lay aside our differences, unite around our common confession and lock arms for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom.

Wax is managing editor of The Gospel Project, a Gospel-centered small group curriculum for all ages published by LifeWay Christian Resources. His commentary appears here courtesy of Baptist Press.

ABEDINI

cont. from p. 1

immediate release, the Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to detain Mr. Abedini while denying him access to necessary medical care," states the ECLJ testimony on the ACLJ website.

"Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran fails to uphold its international obligations as well as basic principles of human dignity," The ECLJ stated Abedini was:

■ "arrested and imprisoned by Iranian Revolutionary Guard;
■ repeatedly beaten in prison;
■ denied access to medi-

cal care made necessary by this abuse;

■ denied access to his attorney until mere hours before his trial;

■ given a sham trial before a judge so notoriously biased and corrupt that he was condemned by the European Union for issuing egregious verdicts;

■ disallowed, along with his counsel, from attending the second day of his trial; and
■ sentenced to eight years in prison for exercising his Christian faith."

On March 11, ACLJ Chief Counsel Jay Sekulow testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee regarding the thousands of persecuted Christians globally, including at least 92 known Christians imprisoned for their faith in Iran.

Keeping Abedini's "case in the international spotlight is quite literally keeping [the pastor] alive," Sekulow said. In February, the U.S. State Department arranged for Naghme Abedini to travel to Washington to meet David Saperstein, U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, to discuss efforts to free the pastor.

Abedini was sentenced Jan. 27, 2013, to eight years in prison on charges he threatened national security by planting house churches in Iran years earlier, after he had been under house arrest since July, 2012.

Abedini's wife and two children, Jacob and eight-year-old daughter Rebekka Grace, have not seen Saeed since his arrest.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2015 SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 16 *

- Presidential Address
- All Seminary Reports

TUESDAY AFTERNOON, JUNE 16 *

- Executive Committee Reports and Recommendations
- Committee on Committees Report
- Committee on Nominations Report
- GuideStone Report
- Elections of All SBC Officers
- Committee on Resolutions Report
- Other SBC Business

TUESDAY NIGHT, JUNE 16 *

- "A National Prayer Gathering of Southern Baptists for the Next Great Awakening and to Reach the World for Christ"
- Brief Moments in God's Word, Seasons of Prayer in Response to God, and Other Expressions of Worship
- Led by Southern Baptist Pastors Enlisted by the SBC President

* The assigned time and session of all elements of the SBC annual meeting program are tentative and subject to change until the Committee on Order of Business formally releases the annual meeting program on or before May 1.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, JUNE 17 *

Entire Session Given to Missions Around the World

- WMU Report
- North American Mission Board Report
- International Mission Board Report
- Followed by "CHURCH AND MISSIONARY SENDING CELEBRATION"

- Celebrating the Church on Mission Around the World
 - Over one hundred Missionaries, Spouses, and Sending Church Pastors
 - Kevin Ezell, president, North American Mission Board
 - David Platt, president, International Mission Board
 - Ronnie Floyd, president, Southern Baptist Convention
 - Shane and Shane, worship leaders

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, JUNE 17 *

- LifeWay Report
- Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission Report
- SBC Presidential Panel: "The Supreme Court and Same-Sex Marriage: Preparing Our Churches for the Future"
 - President Ronnie Floyd, Interviewing Russell Moore, Albert Mohler, and Others
- Convention Sermon, Eddie Bumpers, pastor, Crossway Baptist Church, Springfield, Missouri

MEET

cont. from p. 1

Floyd, in preparing for the Columbus annual meeting, has said it will be "a national gathering of Southern Baptists to pray for the

next great move of God in America and to reach the world for the Gospel of Jesus Christ." For a detailed overview of the schedule, visit sbc.net/presidentpage/article.asp?id=92.

For information about child care and children's and

youth programs, visit bpnews.net/44176/sbc-childrens-youth-registrations-open.

Floyd has released an ebook to provide spiritual preparation for the annual meeting, available for free download at pray4awakening.com.

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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to farther honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

JANUARY 2015

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The Promised Messiah • Zechariah 8:1-8; 9:9-12

"I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem" (Zechariah 9:3 NKJV) Zechariah declares hope to a people in despair, and hope for generations to come. Jesus will return again to Jerusalem and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In Zechariah's day, neither the Temple nor the temple walls were standing, having been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. But the prophet could foresee the day when the Messiah would return and claim the city and His people for His own. He could see this as God revealed it to him. He saw the Promised Messiah.

Faithful (Zechariah 8:1-8)

"I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her." (v. 2 NKJV)

The prophet reminded the people of the fervor of the Lord for His people, even in the midst of their suffering and despair. He could foresee the intentional act of Divine intervention and faithfulness of God to spare nothing to deliver His people from their bondage. Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord, The Holy Mountain and the streets will again fill with men and women, boys and girls walking and playing in the streets. It will be "marvelous in My eyes," says the Lord (v. 6) God says He will bring

the people back, "They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness." (v.8) Those words, spoken centuries before Christ, foretold the truth of Christ as He would and will claim the Holy City for His own.

On one occasion as I had the privilege to go to Israel, our group found itself on the Temple mount. It was very carefully guarded. I wanted to take a picture of the Eastern Gate through which our Lord will one day return. As I approached that entrance, I was quickly turned away by a military guard with gun pointed me know I was not permitted to go there. We know one day that will change.



Explore the Bible

with Kiely D. Young

King (Zechariah 9:9)

"Behold, your King is coming to you: He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey." (v. 9)

God gave Zechariah an understanding of the events of the Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem the week before His crucifixion. Zechariah gave his

people, and all who would follow great reason to rejoice, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!" (v.9) We know for certain there will be another coming of the Lord into Jerusalem. He will come as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!

Creator of Peace (Zechariah 9:10)

"I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow will be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations..." (v. 10)

All the implements of battle will be removed and the Messiah will usher in complete peace. This peace is more

than the absence of war. It is the holy presence of the Living Lord. Zechariah says that peace will be everywhere, "from sea to sea, ... and to the ends of the earth." (v.10b)

We may be quick to ask, "What do we do until then...this world is in chaos?" The prophet Isaiah reminds us "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind

is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3)

Victor (Zechariah 9:11-12)

"Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set the prisoners free from the waterless pit." (v.11)

God was promising He will deliver his people from exile. God was declaring they would be returned to the stronghold and restore them double. He would not only deliver them from exile, He will also return them to the Holy City. That prophecy was fulfilled through the coming of Jesus as Messiah redeeming His people from the captivity of sin, the stronghold of the enemy.

The land of Israel has been a battleground for truth for centuries. It is a place of hostility where the enemies of God continue to attack, physically and spiritually. Our hope is the blessed hope of the return of our Lord. The messenger sent to the disciples of Christ as they stood gazing into the sky as Christ ascended from their presence, told them "This same Jesus who was taken up into heaven, will come in like manner." (Acts 1:11) Even so come quickly Lord Jesus.

Young is retired Sunday School Director, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, and a member of Ridgecrest Church, Madison.

Death Like No Other • Matthew 27:28-31, 45-50, 54

Jesus is like no other. No life compares to His unique life. Prophesied in advance like no other and born miraculously like no other, He displayed power over all creation, while teaching truth like no other. By this point in "His-story" at the age of thirty-three, Jesus had lived a blameless, sinless life of healing the sick, preaching to the multitudes and raising the dead. All He had left to do was die and die He did! His death was certainly the center(cross)piece of the story, but not the end of it!

Providentially unique, His was a death like no other. Jesus gave His life to pay for sins He never committed. Nobody "killed" Jesus. Willingly, He laid down His sinless life to die for all sins: your sins, my sins and the sins of the whole world. His shed blood covered all of mankind, before, during and since the time of the cross. For those who choose to trust and believe in Him, His death is our life.

The final chapters of all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) record for us the crucially significant events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. Today we observe Palm Sunday. Jesus, who had set His face toward the cross, entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Palm branches and personal coats were spread on the ground in front

of Him. Golgotha/Calvary/Mt.Moriah was in His very near future.

Jesus and His donkey got the "scarlet red" carpet treatment. Riding into town, His purpose was to tread all the way to the cross, carpeting the ground with drops of His "scarlet red" blood. He and His disciples had come to observe the high holy days of Passover Week. Arrested the following Thursday evening, Jesus endured trumped-up charges of false witnesses, was tried illegally at night, was crucified on Friday and laid to rest before sundown. (Tune in next week: He observed the Sabbath in the tomb and rose on Sunday morning, leaving that tomb just as it was when they placed him there...EMPTY...except for His abandoned graveclothes!)

We enter the narrative in chapter 27 of Matthew's gospel. Jesus washed 24 feet after the Passover Meal in the Upper Room. He has already been betrayed by

Judas, arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane while praying, denied by Peter three times, taken before the council of the Jewish High Priest and delivered to Pilate, the Roman governor. In verse 26, Pilate released Him to the soldiers to be scourged and then crucified. In verse 28 we see Him stripped of His garments and robed in scarlet. He was crowned with thorns and given a reed scepter in

His right hand. He was cruelly mocked and scorned as King of the Jews by Roman soldiers. They pulled out his beard

(Isaiah 50). They spit on Him. They beat Him on the head AFTER they crowned Him with thorns.

Jesus was led away to be crucified. For these seasoned soldiers, crucifixion was ...oh, just another day at the office, dear. Simply typing these words wounds my heart.

Every Passover Week, the people had an opportunity to release one prisoner of

their choosing. Pilate offered them Jesus the Christ or Barabbas the thief. The name "Jesus" means salvation, rescue and deliverance. The name "Barabbas" means son (bar) of the father (abba). The Son of The True Father was delivered to death on behalf of all sons (and daughters!) of their fathers. Today, prisoners are being set free from bondage to sin by the death and life of the True Son of the Only Father. Surrounded by thieves at His crucifixion, Jesus came to "steal" their hearts!

Jesus was placed on the cross at 9AM. He was removed from the cross at 3PM by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. In the "heart" of day at high noon, the sun was at its most brilliant, casting no shadows at all. There was a period of three hours of complete darkness. I am not exactly certain what happened during the moments of that darkness. I do know that there was an "eternity exchange" made to remove my sins and place them on Jesus. The true Son of The Father became sin for this daughter of God. Now I am His sister! He dies. I live.

One soldier at the foot of Calvary recognized Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus had just died for Him.

Brown is staff evangelist, First Church, Richland.

Bible Studies for Life

with Becky Brown



Revivals & Homecomings

► **Southside Church, Vicksburg:** Revival, Mar. 29 - Apr. 1; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Don

Savell, speaker. ► **Covenant Church, Lucedale:** 10th anniversary, Mar. 29, 10 a.m., followed by

potluck lunch; pastor Grant McLain, speaker.

► **Rocky Point Church, Leake Association:** Revival, Mar. 27 - 29; Fri. - Sat., 7 p.m.; Sun., 11 a.m.; Scott Thomas, II, speaker; Mat-

thew Gaddy, music.

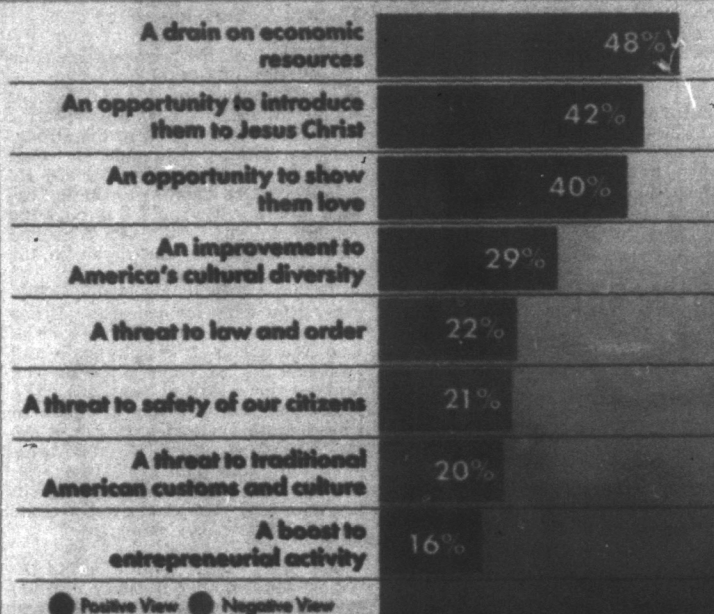
► **Mars Hill Church, Petal:** Revival, Mar. 29 - Apr. 1; Sun., 10 a.m., followed by potluck lunch; Mon. - Wed., complimentary dinner, 6 p.m.; service, 7 p.m.; Scott Murphy,

speaker; Bobby Warren, music; Craig Cluff, pastor.

► **Poplar Springs Church, Newton:** Revival, Apr. 3 - 5; Sun., 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. nightly; Jim Futral, speaker; Kevin White and Jeff Hardy, music.

Among Evangelicals:

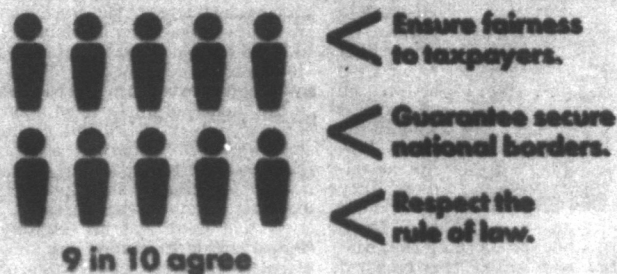
The number of recent immigrants to the U.S. are...



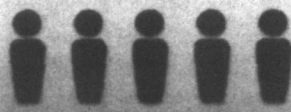
LifeWay

Among Evangelicals:

U.S. immigration reform legislation should...



Establish a path toward legal status



Establish a path toward citizenship



6 in 10 agree

LifeWay Research: Evangelicals want immigration reform

NASHVILLE (BP) — When it comes to immigration reform, a LifeWay Research study shows American evangelicals appear to have high expectations.

Eighty-six percent want more border security. Sixty-one percent support a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Sixty-eight percent favor both. They want Congress to take action soon.

Those are among the results of a new survey of evangelicals from the Nashville-based evangelical research firm, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources. The study, sponsored by the Evangelical Immigration Table and World Relief, found widespread support for immigration reform.

"Evangelicals are united in their desire for significant immigration reform," said Scott McConnell, vice-president of LifeWay Research.

Justice, mercy

A number of high profile evangelical groups have promoted immigration reform in recent years, including the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Latino Evangelical Coalition. Many evangelical pastors also support reform.

A November 2014 LifeWay Research study found many pastors want a mix of justice and mercy when it comes to immigration. Fifty-four percent support a path to citizenship. Ninety-one percent of evangelical pastors also say the government should stop illegal immigration.

In the February 2015 study, researchers found similar views among all evangelicals.

Eighty-eight percent say reform should respect the rule of law, and secure the national borders (86%). They also want to protect the unity of immigrant families (72%) and to respect people's God-given dignity (82%).

Sixty-eight percent of evangelicals say it is important for Congress to take action on immigration reform this year. Half are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports border security and citizenship.

"Evangelicals care about immigrants and want immigration reform," said Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. "We pray for Congress to stop waiting and start legislating."

Still, some concerns

Researchers found some differences by age and ethnicity among evangelicals. Those over age 64 (84%) are more likely to want Congress to

"The sad part of this research on immigration is that American evangelicals are more influenced by the media than by their Bibles and their churches combined. We need to turn off our TVs and open up our Bibles."

Leith Anderson

president of
the National Association
of Evangelicals

act than those 18 - 34 (59%). Those 18 - 34 are more likely (72%) to say reform should include a path to citizenship.

Hispanic evangelicals (79%) are more likely than white evangelicals (54%) to support a path to citizenship.

Some evangelicals are uneasy about the number of recent immigrants to the U.S., according to the survey. Forty-eight percent say immigrants drain the country's economic resources. Twenty-two percent say immigrants are a threat to law and order. One in five believe immigrants threaten traditional American customs and culture.

Other evangelicals view immigration as a chance to love immigrants (40%) or to share Jesus with newcomers (42%).

Little talk, less action

Few evangelicals say their faith directly shapes their views about immigration. Researchers asked evangelicals to list which factor has most influenced their beliefs about immigration. Twelve percent chose the Bible, and only two percent named their church.

Among other influences: relationships with immigrants (17%), friends and family (16%) and the media (16%).

LifeWay Research also found many churches don't talk about immigration, and few take action on this issue. Sixty-eight percent say their church has never encouraged them to reach out to immigrants.

Evangelicals are interested in what their faith says on this topic. Fifty-three percent are familiar with the Bible's teaching about immigrants. Sixty-eight percent say they'd value hearing a sermon about the Bible's views on immigration.

"The sad part of this research on immigration is that American evangelicals are more influenced by the media than by their Bibles and their churches combined," Anderson said. "We need to turn off our TVs and open up our Bibles."

68%

» Percent of evangelicals who say their church has never encouraged them to reach out to immigrants.
» Percent of evangelicals who say they'd value hearing a sermon about the Bible's views on immigration.